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# Modern Philology

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## MARTIN PARKER, BALLAD-MONGER

Martin Parker, most distinguished of professional ballad-writers and leader of a group of lesser Caroline singers, was probably born about 1600. Nothing is known of his early life or of his family. His first extant ballads were published in 1624-25. Of the four that belong to this early period, one ("A Scourge for the Pope") is political, another ("Household Talk") is a didactic pronouncement on the evils resulting from jealousy, but the other two ("Time's Alteration" and "The Country Lass") have a lyrical lilt characteristic of Parker and almost as pleasing to students of ballads as it was to Parker's contemporaries.<sup>1</sup>

Of Parker's education one can judge only from his work, and ballads are printed so carelessly as almost to destroy the value of such evidence. When one brings in all the Greek and Roman Pantheon to the accompaniment of bad grammar, one is likely to prejudice one's readers! Parker's ballads and romances show a wide acquaintance with the popular literature of the day. *Bevis of Hampton*, *Tom Thumb*, *Scoggin's Jests*, and dozens of similar works formed his stock in trade. In a receptive, nay gullible, frame of mind, he read and absorbed all the available broadsides and chap-books (which he called "chronicles"), and revamped them into "A True Tale of Robin Hood," "The Most Admirable History of that Most Renowned Christian Worthy, Arthur King of the Britains,"

<sup>1</sup> For these ballads, see the *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 165, 440; II, 581; IV, 100.

and "A Brief Summary of the History of St. George."<sup>1</sup> Alive to the tricks and exigencies of the trade as he was, Parker had also read hundreds of ballads, traditional as well as broadside; so that, while he could imitate the traditional ballad meter in his "Tale of Robin Hood," or direct his ballads to be sung to the tune of "Sir Andrew Barton" or "Chevy Chase," he could with equal ease string together "Excellent Medleys," whereof every line "spake a separate sense" because it was chosen indiscriminately from an Elizabethan ballad as old and as popular as "Jane Shore" or from the newest song that was being cried through the streets.

In his early period Parker also reveals an interest in classical themes. In a rare effort at real poetry, he wrote *The Nightingale warbling forth her owne Disaster: or, The Rape of Philomela* (1632),<sup>2</sup> professedly getting his material from the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses* and astonishing even his intimate friends with this unwonted display of learning. "I. S." (whom one could wish to believe Sir John Suckling!), in complimentary verses attached to *The Nightingale*, says that translation is as meritorious as a "new creation," and prophesies,

Henceforth so long  
As incest, murders, cruelty and wrong,  
Revenge, and sad *Erinnys* here shall dwell,  
So long this story forth thy praise shall tell.

William Reeve is equally comforting; for he assures Parker that this poem needs no "borrow'd rags of wit"

To please the moderne fry of wit and fame:  
That bribe their Judgments with the Authors name,  
And in the title-page conclude it ill,  
Because it sprung from thy obscurer quill.  
On these set easie thoughts, her voyce shee'l raise  
To sing this unjust rape; and thy just prayse.

But Da. Price, whose verses "To his ingenious friend M.P. Author of this Poem" sent the *Nightingale* forth properly equipped in her

<sup>1</sup> See Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, No. 154; Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 451; Eyre's *Transcript*, II, 96, 256.

<sup>2</sup> A unique copy of this poem was recently offered for sale among other books in the Huth library. It had been reprinted by A. Strettell in 1828 (twenty-six copies).

flight to avoid the slings and arrows of hostile criticism, tells more about Parker's training. He writes:

I often have admir'd thy fluent veine  
 Composing things of an inferiour straine;  
 But neither I nor any man could looke,  
 For such a piece from thee, as this thy booke.  
 Wert thou a scholler then 'twere no rare newes,  
 But being none can any Reader chuse  
 But wonder at thy smooth and haughty stile?  
 Were I not sure thou didst this worke compile,  
 I'd not beleev't; tush, common sense doth show it,  
 'Tis wit not learning, that can make a Poet.  
 Proceed with boldnesse then, and let men see,  
 The Aganippean well doth spring in thee.

In a later work Parker shows familiarity with all the greater names in English literature, and indeed seems to be ranking himself with Chaucer, Jonson, Drayton, Wither, and Shakespeare; but he approached *The Nightingale* with much trepidation. The poem is elaborately prefaced. First comes a dedication "To the Right Honorable *Henry Parker*, Lord *Morley* and *Mount Eagle*, Baron of *Rie*," which makes one suspect that, like Bishop Percy, Parker loved to believe himself allied to a noble family. He apologizes for his boldness in dedicating "this Embrion of my weake braine" to his Lordship, because,

knowing your noble mind to be amply replete with all these vertuous indowments, what wonder is it that I have thus adventured the Poem, for the excellency of the history (I confesse) did deserve a more skillfull penman, being a Tragedy so unpareleld, that I wonder why none of our temporary Laureats have undertaken it before. . . . My Nightingale fearing the hissing Serpents of this envious age desires your powerfull wings to shelter her. And in lieu of your generous approbation of her song, my Muse (by you her noble *Mecænas* animated) shall endeavour heereafter with a Posie of a sweeter odour to kisse the hand of your Honour.

In his address "To the Iudicious Reader" Parker writes as if ridicule had already scathed him:

Let *Apelles* draw his picture with never so much art and iudgement the *Cobler* will find a hole in his coate; let an Author write as learnedly as *Homer* . . . he shall be subiect to the cavilling censure of *Zoilus*; no marvell then if I the most unperfect vassal of the Muses be scoft for my endeavour, when

the best deserving Artist is not free. . . . If my *Nightingale's song* please the honest and intellectuall man, she hath her wish, for she sings not to please knaves and fooles. . . . I have endeavored (as her Secretary) to pen her song, with as much skill as my little learning can produce. . . . Therefore, good Reader, for the love thou bearest to the Muses, iudge charitably now, that I may be animated to proceede to thy future profit and pleasure.

Next follow two seven-line stanzas, "The Author to his Booke, and it to him in manner of a Dialogue," and the three complimentary poems already mentioned. In the "Argument of this Poem or History" Parker retains his ballad-manner to plead that the reader will "note the morall and let the fiction passe as it is"; and in the poem itself his training in ballad-writing causes him to be self-conscious, to strain every nerve in order to make his story seem true, and to moralize in a commonplace fashion.

There are seventy-two seven-line stanzas in the poem, which begins, conventionally enough, with the author's walking to a "curious grove," where the heavenly choristers, especially the lovely Philomel, pleased his senses well. "You that will heare her song," says he, "attend to it":

For by the figure call'd *Prosopopeie*,  
 Ile tell her tale as though herselfe did speake,  
 You'l pardon give, if not so well as shee  
 I paint her story, for my braine's too weake  
 For such a taske, yet I the ice will breake,  
     That others of more learning may indeavour  
     Further to wade in this deepe spatious river.

The story, Parker assures us, is "wofull, wonderfull and tragicall," and at its conclusion the Nightingale remarks:

The reason why the poet sayes wee three,  
 I, and my sister, with her husband, were  
 Transformed into birds, was cause that we  
 Were all unworthy humane shapes to beare,  
 As by our deedes prodigious doth appeare:  
     The morall of the story is the chiefe,  
     As for the changing formes 'tis past beliefe.

Yet there's no doubt but I poore *Philomel*  
 Have nothing sung but what you may believe:  
 Birds seldome use any untruthes to tell,

If you'l not take my warrant I shall grieve;  
 Whether you doe or no let me perceive  
 That you all shun the vices mention'd in't,  
 Then i'le rejoyce because my song's in print.

*The Nightingale* is certainly "not remarkable for any display of imagination or poetical fancy, nor possessed of any extraordinary or striking merit," and it does indeed exhibit "merely the common run of mediocrity";<sup>1</sup> but Parker's work is quite as good as another *Philomela* published in 1622 by a person who is styled, both in the Stationers' Registers and on the title-page of his poem, "Patrick Hannah, gentleman."<sup>2</sup> Nor does it greatly suffer in comparison with Gascoigne's *Philomel*. Parker made no pretensions to gentility,<sup>3</sup> and he probably came to realize that his forte lay in balladry rather than in poetry.

He may have attempted *The Nightingale* because of his successes in ballad-writing during the years 1625-32. For much of his most excellent work was behind him: he had published *A Garland of Withered Roses*<sup>4</sup> (now lost, but doubtless modeled after Thomas Deloney's *Garland of Good Will*), as well as two prose chapbooks and fourteen ballads that can still be traced.<sup>5</sup> One of them, *Robin Conscience*,<sup>6</sup> is quite the equal of the much praised "London Lick-penny," a poem which in many respects it resembles; the others were ditties on the fall of La Rochelle, on the jolly hypocrisy of begging soldiers, on shrewish wives, henpecked husbands, distressed lovers. The books (now lost) were *An Abstract of the Histories of the Renowned Maiden Queen Elizabeth* and *An Abridgment of the Wonderful History of that Irreligious and Unchristian Knight, Sir Timothy Troublesome*. By 1632 Parker had made himself pre-eminent among London balladists and pamphlet-writers. As a

<sup>1</sup> Corser, *Collectanea Anglo-Poetica*, Pt. IX, pp. 113-14.

<sup>2</sup> Registered on July 5, 1622 (Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 73); reprinted by the Spenser Society, 1875.

<sup>3</sup> Though in late copies of "A True Tale of Robin Hood" the title-page announces that the ballad was written "by Martin Parker, gent."

<sup>4</sup> See Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 280, 308.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these have already been mentioned. For the others, see the *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 264, 276, 622; II, 182; III, 110, 121; Pepys Collection, I, 96, 274; *Harleian Miscellany*, I, 47; Hazlitt's *Handbook* (1867), p. 440, No. 14; Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 216, 242, 272.

<sup>6</sup> This may have been a revision of an older ballad: cf. Arber's *Transcript*, II, 358, 405, 576, 596.

poet he was perhaps less successful. What reception *The Nightingale* had among birds of rarer plumage is uncertain, but her song must have sounded feeble to all except Parker's personal friends, and perhaps to her failure was due his relapse into hopelessly "inferior strains."

In his "Description of a Strange and Miraculous Fish, cast upon the Sands in the Meads, in the Hundred of Worwell" (1632?),<sup>1</sup> Parker sinks to the lowest depths of doggerel and journalism:

Full twenty one yards and one foot  
 This fish extends in length,  
 With all things correspondent too't,  
 For amplitude and strength. . . .

His lower jaw-bone's five yards long,  
 The upper thrice so much,  
 Twelve yoak of oxen stout and strong,  
 The weight of it is such,  
 Could not once stir it out o'th sands;  
 Thus works the All-creating hands!  
 O rare,  
 beyond compare,  
 In England nere the like.

Surely as strange a fish as that sung of by Autolycus! Some of Parker's news-stories, however, still have value and interest. "The Honor of the Inns of Court Gentlemen, Or a briefe recitall of the Magnificent and Matchlesse Show, that passed from Hatton and Ely house in Holborne to Whitehall, on Monday night being the third of February [1633-4], and the next day after Candelmas"<sup>2</sup> (describing the pageant of Shirley's masque, *The Triumph of Peace*), and "A briefe description of the triumphant show made by the Right Honourable Aulgeron Percie, Earle of Northumberland, at his Installation and Initiation into the Princely Fraternitie of the Garter,"<sup>3</sup> are accurate in every detail, as a comparison with contemporary historians, like Whitelocke and Lord Stafford, will show.

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in the old Shakespeare Society's *Papers*, 1846, XXXI, 95. Sir Henry Herbert granted licenses to "James Seale to shew a strange fish for half a yeare, the 3d of September, 1632," and to "Francis Sherret, to shew a strange fish for a yeare, from the 10th of Marche, 1635" (Malone's *Shakspeare*, 1821, XIV, 368; XV, 95).

<sup>2</sup> Collier's *Broadside Black-letter Ballads*, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, III, 219.

A constant stream of ballads came from Parker's pen during 1632-40. No other ballad-writer is now represented by so many extant ballads, and none was more versatile. Parker had an innate vein of poetry that usually kept him from sinking to the level of his fellow-writers, even when dealing with lugubrious and sensational subjects. Of such subjects he was evidently none too fond. It is remarkable that of the fifteen ballads that can be dated 1634, only one (the ballad on Percy) is reportorial. The others are popular songs,<sup>1</sup> which are quite the equal of even the choicest productions of the American rag-time crew.

Important in its results was "Sailors for my Money. A new Ditty composed in the praise of Sailors and Sea affaires."<sup>2</sup> Parker may have revised some old ballad, for there are entries in the Stationers' Registers of ballads entitled "the perilous paynes of poore maryners" and "the danger of Sailers and their troubles turmoile and paine," on October 13, 1579, and March 10, 1581-2.<sup>3</sup> His ballad beginning,

Countrie men of *England*, who live at home with ease,  
And little thinke what dangers are incident o' th' Seas,

was slightly revised and brought up to date by some unknown writer under the title of "Neptune's Raging Fury," the exemplars of which date about 1678.<sup>4</sup> The first two lines, which have been changed to

You Gentlemen of *England*, that lives at home at ease,  
Full little do you think upon the dangers of the Seas,

at once suggest England's naval ode by Thomas Campbell. Campbell frankly admitted the borrowing, publishing his ode (in the *London Morning Chronicle*, January, 1801) under the title, "Alteration of the Old Ballad 'Ye Gentlemen of England,' composed on the Prospect of a Russian War." Parker wrote another ballad as famous and as influential as "Sailors for my Money," but neither

<sup>1</sup> See *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 434, 503, 581; II, 114, 142, 413, 554, 586; III, 231, 236, 242, 248, 284; VI, 695. For registrations, see *Arber's Transcript*, IV, 313, 315, 317-20, 322, 325, 327, 331; *Eyre's Transcript*, II, 61, 70, 498.

<sup>2</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, VI, 796.

<sup>3</sup> *Arber's Transcript*, II, 361, 407.

<sup>4</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, VI, 431; registered on July 1, 1678 (*Eyre's Transcript*, III, 67).



has sufficed to keep his own name alive. He is remembered by none but the specialist.

Only three of his productions are known to have appeared in 1636,<sup>1</sup> and three in 1637, the year of Ben Jonson's death. Jonson is alluded to in Parker's *Harry White his Humour*,<sup>2</sup> a stupid pamphlet made up of a series of inane remarks, each followed by the phrase, "This is [or is not] Harry White's humour." The pamphlet concludes with "An Applause by L[aurence] P[rice] of the author M.P.," interesting only as showing that friendly relations existed between Parker and Price, his greatest rival. Parker's "Bill of Fare"<sup>3</sup> is based on the coarse song, "A Strange Banquet," from Jonson's masque of *The Gipsies Metamorphosed*, and was highly commended by John Taylor, the Water Poet.<sup>4</sup>

Journalism returns with a vengeance in Parker's account of "Two Inseparable Brothers; Or, A true and strange description of a Gentleman (an *Italian* by birth), about seventene yeeres of age, who hath an imperfect (yet living) Brother growing out of his side, having a head, two armes, and one leg, all perfectly to be seen. They were both baptized together; the imperfect is called *John Baptist*, and the other *Lazarus*. Admire the Creator in his Creatures."<sup>5</sup> On November 4, 1637, nineteen days before the ballad was registered, Sir Henry Herbert had granted "a license for six months . . . to Lazarus, an Italian, to shew his brother Baptista, that grows out of his navell, and carryes him at his syde. In confirmation of his Majesty's warrant, granted unto him to make publique shewe."<sup>6</sup> In the ballad (which is properly furnished with a woodcut indisputably proving that

A Gentleman, well qualifide, doth beare his brother at his side,  
Inseparably knit,  
As in this figure you may see, and both together living be:  
The world admires at it),

<sup>1</sup> See *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 592; III, 51; Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 366, 367.

<sup>2</sup> Registered on May 16, 1637 (Arber, IV, 384); reprinted at Oxford in 1846 and by Halliwell-Phillipps in 1851.

<sup>3</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 70; Arber, IV, 394.

<sup>4</sup> See "A Bill of Fare," which concludes his *Taylor's Feast* (registered on November 10, 1637, just about a month after Parker's pamphlet was entered).

<sup>5</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, VIII, 26, 876; Arber, IV, 399.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in another connection in Malone's *Shakspeare*, 1821, XIV, 368.

Parker declares that even the king and queen have seen and marveled at the brothers; and proof of their popularity is found in allusions to them in poems by John Cleveland and Alexander Brome.<sup>1</sup> If one were anxious to injure Parker's reputation, one could advance strong evidence to show that he soon outdid himself by writing anonymously a prose tract called *A certaine Relation of the Hog-faced Gentlewoman called Mistris Tannakin Skinker, who was borne at Wirkham*.<sup>2</sup> "The Woman Monster," "A Maiden Monster," "A Strange Relacion of a Female Monster," and "A new Ballad of the swines faced Gentlewoman," ballads licensed during December, 1639, show how keen was the interest Smithfield felt in Miss Skinker.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not *Martin Parker his maruelous prognostication*, a book licensed on January 31, 1638,<sup>4</sup> warned its readers of the imminence of civil war, the ominous political situation was strongly reflected in his other work from 1638 to 1640. His "Briefe dissection of Germaines Affliction,"<sup>5</sup> a long ballad of sixty-eight stanzas, was from first to last a warning to England. Events now conspired to drive Parker to journalism, though he never wholly discarded lyrical ballads. In 1639 he wrote a ballad on a "Fearful Fight at Sea, between the Spaniard and the Hollander";<sup>6</sup> and five ballads in which he reviled the Scots for their share in the Bishops' Wars are extant.<sup>7</sup> Probably he wrote many others, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the government encouraged him to pen these

<sup>1</sup> Cleveland's *Poems*, ed. Berdan, p. 123:

The Italian monster pregnant with his brother,  
Nature's diæresis half one another,  
He, with his little sides-man Lazarus,  
Must both give way unto Smectymnuus.

Brome's Thirty-fifth Epistle, *Poems*, 2d ed., p. 244:

We are a *miracle*, and 'tis with us  
As with *John Baptist* and his *Lazarus*:  
I thou, and thou art I, and 'tis a wonder,  
That we both live, and yet both live asunder.

Neither allusion has before been explained. Note that both poets, in contradiction to Parker and Sir Henry Herbert, name Lazarus as the "imperfect"!

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in Ashbee's *Occasional Fac-simile Reprints*, No. 16; registered on December 5, 1639 (Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 492).

<sup>3</sup> See Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 492 f.; *Roxburghe Ballads*, VIII, 28 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 406.

<sup>5</sup> Registered on February 9, 1637-8 (*ibid.*, IV, 408); see Collier's *Bibliographical Account*, II, 99.

<sup>6</sup> *Ballads and other Fugitive Pieces from the Collections of Sir James Balfour*, pp. 8-12; cf. Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 480, 484.

<sup>7</sup> Three of them are reprinted by C. H. Firth in the *Scottish Historical Review*, April, 1906, pp. 263-72.

mocking ditties. All of them are rampantly patriotic; all represent (if in a crude manner) what the Royalists were thinking. It appears, however, that Parker's zeal as "the prelates' poet" carried him too far, and that he was in danger of being imprisoned. Such at least is the testimony of "Margery Marprelate."<sup>1</sup>

In 1638 he re-issued *Cupids College, or the Court of Complements*,<sup>2</sup> and published a "book" called *The Antipodes*.<sup>3</sup> Neither of these is extant, but perhaps their loss is atoned for by the preservation of his horror ballad on an earthquake that happened in Calabria on March 27, 1638.<sup>4</sup> After an enumeration of commonplace as well as gruesome details about this calamity, Parker appended a "memorialis or List of some Earthquakes and other horrible accidents which heretofore have hapned in England," to give more probability and piquancy to his story. Another lost work, *The true story of Guy, Earle of Warwicke in prose*, was licensed on November 24, 1640.<sup>5</sup>

By 1640 Parker had written some sixty-five ballads, romances, and prose tracts of ascertainable date, and about fifteen other ballads known to be his had surely appeared before this time. His supremacy had long been indisputable, his reputation was considerable, and it was quite natural, then, for Henry Glapthorne to make Clare, in *Wit in a Constable* (1639),<sup>6</sup> warn Sir Timothy:

If upon these conditions you can like  
The match is perfect: but faith take my counsell,  
Make not your selves meere raskalls: the reproach  
To boyes and schollers, subjects fit for ballads,  
Not worthy M Ps name to them.

Thomas Nabbes, too, knew M.P., and referred to him in his comedy *The Bride* (1640).<sup>7</sup> After Theophilus has eloped with the woman who has come to be married to his foster-father, he asks Raven: "Cosin, the news? how go matters?" Raven replies:

Noise fills the roomes within, and in the street  
The rabble is convented; where a jury

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 461.

<sup>2</sup> Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 273, 301, 308, 413.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 419; Hindley's *Old Book Collector's Miscellany*, III, No. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Eyre's *Transcript*, I, 3.

<sup>6</sup> IV, i (*Plays*, ed. Pearson, 1874, I, 215).

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, ed. Bullen, 1887, II, 31.

Of wide mouth'd oyster wives, to whom the foreman  
 A one legg'd ballad singer opens tunably  
 The merry case, not onley do acquit you,  
 But prayse the act; and sweare a ballad of it  
 Would out sell all the libels ever yet  
 M.P. subscrib'd to.

Parker was doubtless pleased with this notoriety.

He was soon to come into greater prominence. His ballads delighted all persons save those of puritanical bent who regarded ballad-singing as ungodly. At least fifteen thousand such persons detested him! The Long Parliament met in November, 1640, and on December 11 "Alderman Pennington, with some hundreds following him, presented the Citizens Petition, subscribed by 15000, against the Discipline, and Ceremonies of the Church."<sup>1</sup> The petition itself was supported by "A Particular of the manifold Evils, Pressures, and Grievances caused, practised, and occasioned by the Prelates and their Dependants," of which this was Article VIII:

The swarming of lascivious, idle, and unprofitable Books and Pamphlets, Play-books, and Ballads, as namely, *Ovids* fits of Love, the Parliament of Women [which] came out at the dissolving of the last Parliament, *Barnes* Poems, *Parkers* Ballads in disgrace of Religion, to the increase of all vice, and withdrawing of people from reading, studying, and hearing the Word of God, and other good Bookes.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Digby, however, either did not know Parker by reputation and hence easily confused him with another writer, or else deliberately avoided using his name in the House of Commons; for in his address on February 9, 1641, he said:

Contemptible things (Sir) swarme in the 8. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. Articles of this Petition. Did ever any body think, that the gaites of *Ovid*, or *Tom. Caryes* muse, should by 15000, have beene presented to a Parliament, as a motive for the extirpation of Bishops?<sup>3</sup>

Thirty-three years later Andrew Marvell used the eighth article in

<sup>1</sup> Whitelocke's *Memorials*, 1732, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> A copy of the original tract in the Harvard Library differs somewhat from a reprint that will be found in Rushworth's *Historical Collections*, Pt. III, i, 94.

<sup>3</sup> *The Third Speech of the Lord George Digby, to the House of Commons, concerning Bishops, and the Citie Petition, the 9th of Febr: 1640.*

the Citizens' Petition as a stinging nettle for his enemy, Dr. John Parker.<sup>1</sup>

Parker's reputation as "the prelates' poet" was responsible for the attack made on him in an anti-episcopal pamphlet called "*Laws and Ordinances*, forced to be agreed upon by the Pope and his Shavelings for the disposing of his adherents and the Popish Rites he sent into England":

Article 2.—We appoint John Taylor, Martin Parker, and Herbert, all three English poetical, papistical, atheistical ballad-makers, to put in print rhyme-doggerly from the river of Styx, against the truest Protestants, in railing lines; and, in the end, young Gregory [Brandon, the public hangman] shall be their paymaster.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Downefall of Temporizing Poets* (1641) Lightfoot says to Red-nose ("the Regent Master of all Ballad-singers," a "worthy Patron of Strangullion Poetry"):

You [ballad-writers] are very religious men, rather than you will lose half a crowne, you will write against your own Fathers: You will make mens wills before they be sicke, and hang them before they are in prison, and cut off

<sup>1</sup> In *The Rehearsall Transpos'd: The Second Part*, 1673 (*Works*, ed. Grosart, III, 281-83), after various attempts to connect Dr. Parker with renegades that had borne his name, Marvell wrote: "But that which seems to come nearest home to him and the chronology of his grandfather, is in the year 1640 [the year in which Dr. Parker was born], in a petition from the city of London and several counties to the then Parliament; complaining, among other things, of Martin Parker's ballads, in disgrace of religion, to the increase of all vice, and withdrawing of people from reading, studying, and hearing the Word of God and other good books. 'Tis not at all unlikely that this, as an hereditary provocation, hath stuck upon him ever since, and that he swore at the altar, when he was but nine years old, to be aveng'd for this affront to his lineage. We see often that the signature of the grandfather revives upon the child, and, as some rivers diving for a while under ground, make a bridge of the parents to spring up again at that interval. Hence, doubtless, hath proceeded all his peek against the Nonconformists; hence that unquenchable Nemesis against the City; hence it is that he hath taken upon him to defend in gross at this time the whole mass of enormities, right or wrong, then complained of in that petition: all this mischief for a ballad-maker's sake of the kindred. The Duke of Muscovy indeed declared war against Poland because he and his nation had been vilified by a Polish poet; but the author of the Ecclesiastical Politie would, it seems, disturb the peace of Christendom for the good old cause of a superannuated chanter of Saffron-Hill and Pye-Corner. But though indeed he doth not write his books in the Smithfield meetre, yet they are all blank ballad, and the subject and consequence 'to the disgrace of religion, the increase of all vice, and withdrawing people from reading, studying, and hearing the Word of God and other good books,' is exactly the same. So that he may when he will put in for letters of administration in the Prerogative Court, and enter his claim too with the Heralds; for every one will yield him to be the next-of-kin to that Author; or let him but produce his own writings, 'tis evidence sufficient."

<sup>2</sup> Chappell, *Popular Music*, II, 418 f. I have observed that the Herbert mentioned above has an (unimportant) allusion to Parker in his *Newes out of Islington* (1641): "Perhaps you may verifie the old proverb; what saies M. Parker? the more knave the better fortune."

heads before you know why or wherefore. You have an indifferent strong Corporation: 23 of you sufficient writers, besides *Martin Parker*.<sup>1</sup>

Parker's supremacy among balladists was always taken for granted by his contemporaries. Further proof—if any were needed—of this supremacy is found in *Vox Borealis*, a prose tract that describes itself as being “by way of dialogue between Jamie and Willie. Amidst the Babylonians, Printed, by Margery Mar-Prelat, in Thwackcoat-lane, at the Signe of the Crab-tree Cudgell; without any priviledge of the Cater-Caps, the yeare coming on, 1641.”<sup>2</sup> The author (who is suspected to have been Sir John Mennis) comments on the imprisonment of the author of the ballad “Blue Cap for Me,” and then remarks: “One *Parker*, the Prelats Poet, who made many base Ballads against the *Scots*, sped but *little better*, for he, and his *Antipodes* were like to have tasted of Justice *Longs liberalitie*:<sup>3</sup> and hardly he escaped his Powdering-Tubb, which the vulgar people calls a Prison.” Why *The Antipodes*, a pamphlet at this time almost three years old, was singled out for mention is doubtful. But Parker was evidently deluging the streets with other journalistic songs in addition to his “base ballads against the Scots,” for in 1641 Henry Peacham remarked that “for a Penny,

<sup>1</sup> Sign. A 3 b.

<sup>2</sup> There is a reprint of this tract in the *Harleian Miscellany*, III, 219.

<sup>3</sup> Seccombe, in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (s.v. “Parker”), explains “Justice Long” as equivalent to “the Long Parliament,” thus investing Margery Marprelate (who wrote “in the year coming on, 1641”) with prophetic powers. “Long’s powdering-tub” seems to have been a proverbial phrase, of the use of which I have noted many other instances. A tract called *A Nest of perfidious Vipers* (*Harl. Miscel.*, V, 553) says of Wren: “Make his *Mittimus* to the Gate-house [a London prison], or obtain the Favour of *Long’s Powdering-Tub*, which shall powder him soundly, long enough before he come forth.” *The Remonstrance of Declaration of Mr. Henry Martin, and all whole Society of Levellers* (1646) says: “Presently these petty Knaves with painted staves, presently appeare and sease on us and our creatures, and transport us straight to a Justice of peace . . . and then Mr. Justice of peace after sends us to Justice *Longes powdering Tub*.” In satirical verses added to Gayton’s *Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixot*, 1654, p. 288, we read, “Wee’ll find a place for thee, neer justice *Longs*.” In Wycherly’s *Love in a Wood* (III, ii) Dapperwit asks Mrs. Crossbite if she intends to change her lodgings “to Bridewell, or Long’s powdering-tub,” which Ward (*Mermaid* ed., p. 65) explains thus: “The name of powdering-tub was applied to places where persons afflicted with a certain disease were cured” (see also the *New English Dictionary*). A disreputable Justice Long is frequently mentioned in Civil War tracts: the *Perfect Diurnall of Occurrences* (December 6–13, 1641) tells that he was arrested and sent to the Tower (he was interrogated during the following week); the *Weekly Intelligence* for October 10–18, 1642, remarks, “There was on saturday Justice *Longs* man taken following his Master with such colours (like man, like master). . . .” But Parker interpreted Margery’s remark as meaning simply that he had been imprisoned.

you may have all the news in England and other countries, of murders, floods, witches, fires, tempests, and what not, in one of Martin Parker's *Ballads*."<sup>1</sup> "But now," continues Margery, "he sweares he will never put pen to paper for the Prelats againe, but betake himselfe to his pitcht Kanne, and Tobacco Pipe; and learne to sell his frothie Pots againe, and give over Poetrie."

On this passage is based the assumption, accepted by the *Dictionary of National Biography*, that Parker was a tavern-keeper. It is not improbable, and indeed seems to be supported by his familiarity with the laws regulating ale-houses and with the tricks of the trade shown by him in his *Robin Conscience*, as well as by the title of one of his works, "Certaine verses of Martin Parker against trusting to sett vp in Alehouses."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, one would expect to find Parker, if he had been a tavern-keeper, defending his occupation in his reply.

He did reply, both to Margery and to other anonymous authors whose works are lost or else inaccessible to me, in a work with this astonishing title: "*The Poet's Blind mans bough*, or Have among you my blind Harpers: being A pretty medicine to cure the Dimme, Double, Envious, Partiall, and Diabolically eyesight and Iudgement of Those Dogmaticall, Schismaticall, Aenigmaticall, and non Gramaticall Authors who Lycentiously, without eyther Name, Lycence, Wit or Charity, have raylingly, falsely, and foolishly written a numerous rable of pestiferous Pamphlets in this present and the precedent yeare, justly observed and charitably censured, By Martine Parker"<sup>3</sup> In the poetical preface "To the Truly Iudicious, Impartiall, Charitable, and Impreivdicated Christian Reader of what quality, age or sex soever," Parker expresses the hope that the reader will

contented be,  
With what is Publish'd by (abus'd) M.P.  
Who never wrot but in the Iust defence,  
Of's King and Countrey; now's owne innocence.

<sup>1</sup> "The Worth of a Penny," Arber's *English Garner*, VI, 271.

<sup>2</sup> Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 367.

<sup>3</sup> A copy (1641) is in the Widener Collection, Harvard College; reprints are in Ashbee's *Occasional Fac-simile Reprints* and Hindley's *Old Book Collector's Miscellany*.

In the poem itself he disclaims the purpose of destroying the shameless crew of nameless authors who have attacked him: he will simply check them, for "Eagles sleight notice take when crowes doe creak." He laughs to scorn charges made against him in the *Popish Proclamation* and by one John Thomas in *Mercuries Message*. Turning to Margery, he ridicules the

Borealist by some brother pen,  
Yet father'd on a sect to this end,  
To bring me in disgrace; as though I had,  
Bin punisht heretofore for writing bad,  
Calling me th' Prelats Poet and such tearmes,  
Which nothing but his spight at all confirms,  
For I ne're wrot ith' Bishops cause so much,  
As now I have on this occasion touch.

What especially provoked him was the anonymity of the attacks, not only on himself but also on his friends, John Taylor and Herbert. "More danger," he remarks, "comes bith' quill then by the Sword"; anonymous attacks are cowardly, for an author's "name should iustifie what he hath done":

This maxim I have alwaies thought upon  
What ever yet was published by mee,  
Was knowne by *Martin Parker*, or M.P.  
All Poets (as adition to their fames)  
Have by their Works eternized their names,  
As Chaucer, Spencer, and that noble earle,  
Of Surrie thought it the most precious pearle,  
That dick'd his honour, to Subscribe to what  
His high engenuie ever amed at  
*Sydney* and *Shakspire*, *Drayton*, *Withers* and  
Renowned *Ionson* glory of our Land:  
*Deker*, Learn'd *Chapman*, *Haywood* although good,  
To have their names in publike understood.

This utterance should make one very careful about attributing to Parker works that were published during his lifetime without his signature.<sup>1</sup> It also throws interesting light on his personal ambitions. In his postscript Parker declares:

I have but broke the Ice, some coadiuters  
Will helpe to scourge these paper-persecuters.

<sup>1</sup> But many of the unsigned Roxburghe Ballads are attributed to him by Chappell and Ebsworth.



One coadjutor was John Taylor, whose satires were as numerous as they were feared. There seems to be no doubt that Parker believed himself an artist, that he had a high sense of his art and his responsibilities. Perhaps it was this feeling that made him the best balladist of his time.

The Stationers' Registers do not mention Parker from November 24, 1640, to March 25, 1658, but he must have been writing constantly. In 1643 appeared his most famous ballad, "When the King Enjoys his Own Again,"<sup>1</sup> known to everybody, if for no other reason, because it is sung by Roger Wildrake in *Woodstock*. It was, said Joseph Ritson, in his *Ancient Songs* (1790), p. 229,

the most famous and popular air ever heard of in this country. Invented to support the declining interest of the Royal Martyr, it served afterwards, with more success, to keep up the spirits of the Cavaliers, and promote the Restoration of his Son; an event it was employed to celebrate all over the kingdom. At the Revolution [of 1688] it of course became an adherent of the exiled family, whose cause it never deserted. And . . . upon two memorable occasions, was very near being . . . instrumental in replacing . . . [the crown] on the head of . . . [James II's] Son. It is believed to be a fact, that nothing fed the enthusiasm of the Jacobites . . . in every corner of Great Britain, more than "The King shall enjoy his own again."

The ballad was imitated and parodied for quite two hundred years.

Parker's reputation was meanwhile increasing. The *Actors Remonstrance, or Complaint, for the Silencing of their profession* (1643), enumerating the evils that had befallen members of the "quality," declared that "it is to be feared, that shortly some of them (if they have not been enforced to do it already) will be encited to enter themselves into *Martin Parkers* societie, and write ballads."<sup>2</sup> Samuel Sheppard's complaint was that

Each fellow now that hath but had a view  
Of the learned Phrygians Fables groweth bold,  
And name of Poet doth to himself accrew;

\*\*M.P. That ballad maker\*\* too is now extold  
With the great name of poet. \*He that knew

<sup>1</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, VII, 633, 682.

<sup>2</sup> Ashbee's *Occasional Fac-simile Reprints*, No. 4, p. 7; also reprinted by F. Marshall, London, 1822, and by Hindley.

\*J.T. Better far how to row, then pen to hold,  
 His sordid lines are sweld to such a weight,  
 Theyre able for to make his boat a freight.<sup>1</sup>

If Parker had the "great name" of poet in 1646, it was probably because he had kept himself before the public with ballads now lost or untraceable; for almost nothing that he wrote from 1643 to 1655 is known. But Humphrey Mill, writing in the same year as Sheppard, thought little of Parker's poetry. In a catalogue of articles seized from a harlot he names

A boxe of salve, and two brasse rings;  
 With *Parker's* workes, and such like things.<sup>2</sup>

In January, 1647, Charles I was sequestered in the Isle of Wight, and communication with him was made high treason. There is reason to believe that henceforth Parker's life was a hard one. Ballads continued to pour forth in great numbers, but all had to be published surreptitiously, and were attended with danger to author, printer, and singer. When ballad-singing and the publishing of anti-Parliament tracts were forbidden by the House of Commons in February, 1647, most of the ballad-writers had betaken themselves to prose tracts, the superiority of which over ballads for personal attacks and effective ridicule was just beginning to be felt. The newspaper, everybody admits, grew out of the ballad; but more significant still is the fact, usually ignored, that ballad-writers themselves wrote many of the earliest news-pamphlets. The number of Royalist pamphlets soon became so large, and their attacks on Parliament so stinging, that many laws, most of them for a time ineffectual, were passed to drive them out of existence.

From 1647 to 1650 Parker seems to have played a rôle of importance among the Royalist pamphleteers—John Taylor, Samuel Sheppard, John Cleveland, John Hakluyt, and others. Some account of his work will be found in Mr. J. B. Williams' *History of English Journalism* (1908).<sup>3</sup> Only the barest outline will be given here.

<sup>1</sup> "The Times Displayed," 1646 (*British Bibliographer*, I, 530). Not many years later Sheppard, Taylor, and Parker were to be associated in a dangerous evasion of the publishing laws.

<sup>2</sup> *Night Search*, quoted in *British Bibliographer*, II, 432.

<sup>3</sup> See also his chapter (xv) in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, VII. Parker's part in this pamphleteering needs a thorough investigation, which (for reasons that will be obvious) it is now impossible to give.

*Mercurius Melancholicus; or, Newes from Westminster and other Parts*, the first of the Royalist pamphlets, was published by John Hakluyt, a Presbyterian minister, on September 4, 1647. So ambiguous were his comments on the king that (says Mr. Williams<sup>1</sup>) Parker challenged "his claim to write *Melancholicus* at all," eventually beat him "out of the field, and the numbers of his [own] *Mercurius Melancholicus*, which he persistently declares to be the only true and original *Melancholicus*, can generally be distinguished by the different style." In September, 1647, Parliament passed an ordinance providing for fines and imprisonment to be inflicted on the authors, printers, and sellers of unlicensed books, pamphlets, treatises, and ballads.<sup>2</sup> Licensed editors aided in the hunt for the Royalist writers. Henry Walker, the Puritan iron-monger, anxious to crush Hakluyt, began a *Mercurius Medicus* directed against him. The editor of *Melancholicus* replied in Hakluyt's defense, remarking that "Martin Parker it seems hath penned a very doleful ballad called Luke Harruney's [Walker's anagram] confession and lamentation at the gallows, to the tune of the 'Earle of Essex last good-night.'"<sup>3</sup> No further *Mercuries* came from Walker.

On November 27 the House of Commons endowed with full powers a committee of ten (who were at liberty "to meet when and where they please") to inquire after the authors, printers, and publishers of the *Mercurius "Elenchicus," Mercurius Pragmaticus*, or any similar work, and to take special steps to prevent the publication of further pamphlets of this kind. On January 6, 1648, it ordered the committee to "constantly sit, and take Course, according to the Powers given them, to remedy the Abuses in Printing," and two days later provided for more effectual legislation to that end.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Williams says that on February 25 the House offered rewards for the discovery of the writers of *Melancholicus* and *Pragmaticus*, and he gives us Parker's comment on the subject.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of English Journalism*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, V, 309, 319.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>4</sup> *Journals*, V, 371, 420, 424.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 92; cf. *Journals*, V, 471, and Rushworth's *Historical Collections*, Pt. IV, ii, 914-15.

Throughout the year 1648 the Royalist pamphleteers were continually being arrested. The prisons were full, but the prisoners always managed to escape.<sup>1</sup> The editor of *Melancholicus* (whom Mr. Williams confidently identifies with Parker) writes of having got his "foot out of the springe" at Peter House on June 26, where he had been "neere starved to death by that murdering villain Symball," and sends his "commendations to his friends there, Mr. Sheppard, John Harrison, and the rest."<sup>2</sup> As soon as they escaped, these men always resumed publication of their *Mercuries* or else published new ones. But Parker's fame for ballads was not overshadowed by his prose tracts. In June, 1648, *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (No. 12) attacked Rous's translation of the Psalms, remarking that discerning spirits will charge Rous with having taken Martin Parker "and such *high flying wits* of this *Reformation*, to be partners in the work." "I wonder," he adds, "the Company of *Stationers* would deprive the Corporation of *Ballad-mongers* of such a *choice peece*."

In September, 1648, Captain Bethan was made provost-marshal, with power to suppress ballads and news-pamphlets,<sup>3</sup> and he performed his work so thoroughly that from this date until 1656 no ballads were entered at Stationers' Hall. Accordingly, there is no record of what ballads Parker wrote during this period, though it is highly improbable that he had ceased to write. Bethan also succeeded in putting an end to most of the *Mercuries*, and such as were struggling on became even harder to publish when General Fairfax and the Parliamentary Army occupied London. One by one the papers perished. There are records of the imprisonment of Taylor, Hakluyt, Sheppard, Cleveland, and others, but not of Martin Parker. He seems, however, upon one occasion to have been placed in the pillory;<sup>4</sup> while *Mercurius Morbicus* informs us that in the autumn of 1647 he was hauled off to prison on his wedding-day.<sup>5</sup> John Taylor, almost betrayed to Parliament, prudently left London on one of those long-distance rambles which he so voluminously describes.

<sup>1</sup> See *Commons' Journals*, V, 666; VI, 111.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Whitelocke's *Memorials*, p. 337.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> So Mr. Williams has informed me in a personal letter.

Returning to London on August 4, 1649, he was arrested eleven days later and imprisoned. Afterward released, he died in 1653. Mr. Williams remarks that "nothing is known of Martin Parker after this date, and he may have died in prison."<sup>1</sup>

The date of Parker's death is altogether uncertain. He and Taylor are referred to in *The Joviall Crew, or the Devill turn'd Ranter* (1651),<sup>2</sup> two of his ballads are quoted in Walton's *Complete Angler* (1653),<sup>3</sup> and he is rather slightly mentioned in Flecknoe's *Miscellanea* (1653).<sup>4</sup> Probably he was dead in 1656, when a certain "S.F." wrote "*Death in a new dress, or sportive funeral Elegies, commemorating the renowned lives and lamented deaths of these eminent personages, Robbin the Annyseed-water seller, Martin Parker the famous poet, Archee the late Kings Jester*"; but it should be remembered that Archie Armstrong lived until 1672. The elegy on Parker is of great interest, all the more so because it has not before been reprinted:<sup>5</sup>

*On the Death of the most Renowned Poet,*

*Mr. Martin Parker*

AN ELEGIE

How has it happen'd (speak ye tardy *Nine*)  
That glorious *Parker* (he whose every line  
Deserves a Panegyre) has all this while  
Slept like a Slave, beneath his Funeral Pile,  
And no new *Johnson, Dun*, or learned *Gill*,  
To Dub the distillations of his Quill,  
To Canonize his Canzonets, which are  
Yet extant on each Market-day, or Fair.  
Spirit of *Orpheus*; *Archimedes* skill  
Would fail (should he bring in his tedious Bill)  
To number all thy curious Canticles,  
Thy Octaves, Epicedes, and Madrigals,  
Which (as was us'd of old) did kindly greet  
The peoples ears, as they did pass the street;

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Censura Literaria*, 2d ed., III, 209.

<sup>3</sup> Walton quotes thirteen lines from Parker's "Keep a Good Tongue in your Head" and "The Milkmaid's Life" (*Roxburghe Ballads*, II, 114; III, 236), as was first pointed out by J. P. Collier (in the *Athenaeum*, August 30, 1845, p. 859).

<sup>4</sup> *Censura Literaria*, III, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Its existence has been noted only in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The reprint here given was made from photographs of the elegy secured from the British Museum.

Sung to the pleasant Treble and the Base,  
 The Small or Great, the Sharp or Flat, to grace  
 Thy sublime Sonnets; was not every Song  
 Of thine applauded by the thirsty throng,  
 So (as to *Thracian Orpheus*) Trees did nod  
 When thou wert worried by the *Delphick* god;  
 And Stones did move; nay, gave a vocal sound,  
 Till with loud laughter every verse was crown'd.  
 Here thou wert *Pindar*, *Alceus*, *Moschus*, *Bion*  
*Apollo*s lov'd one, and the Muses Lion:  
 But these were but thy sports; some minutes spent  
 In *Mimmick* state, to palliate meriment:  
 Let us behold thee in thy *German* Story,  
 There thou art *Lucan*, while thy Muse (all glory)  
 Does sing the *Austrian* Ruines in a tone  
 More strong then *Stentors*, with O hone! O hone!  
 Say'st thou to *Silius*; here are other things,  
 The Deeds of *Pacolet*, and *Pagan* Kings:  
 Oh! in what stately Verse thou didst discourse on  
 The Doughty deeds of *Valentine* and *Orson*;  
 Dull Prose before, and fit for Boyes and Girles,  
 Thine for the solace of great Lords and Earls.

Speak ye nine Sisters, for ye only know  
 Whence did this sprightly sparkling Torrent flow;  
 How has our *Parker* above all inspir'd  
 His Lines so much cry'd up, so much desir'd?  
 I have't; He alwayes bath'd his Beak in Ale,  
 Topping whole Tubs off, like some thirsty Whale;  
*Phoebus* and *Hermes* gave their joint consent  
 Their Priest should keep a Tippling-Tenement:  
*Martin* might well do more then *Goffe* or *Graunger*,  
 Who (like a Horse) fed at the Muses Manger.  
*Hyperion's* Host is sunk beneath his Barrels,  
 Ceas then your hom-bred Feuds, & stint your quarrels  
 Ye that pretend to be his Heirs; in Sooth-la  
 Ye do dishonour the deceased Youth-la;  
 All that ye ought to minde are Sighes and Tears,  
 Death-beds and Funerals, and Scriveners ears;  
 Weep, weep until the floud-gates of your eyes  
 Do drown the world for *Parker's* Obsequies.

Offering further proof of the undisputed pre-eminence of M.P. among the ballad-writers, the elegy also gives information of interest about one of his most pretentious works. Of course the German

story in which Parker is Lucan was his *Brief Dissection of Germany's Affliction*, published eighteen years earlier; but the stately verse of *Valentine and Orson*, laughingly praised by S.F., has disappeared, and S.F.'s is the first mention of it. Thomas Vere registered on March 25, 1658, "A booke called *A memoriall of those two French princes, Valentine and Orson, sons of the high & mighty Alexander the Grecian Emperour &c*, written in English heroicall verse by Martin Parker,"<sup>1</sup> and six days later assigned it to Francis Coles. Evidently several editions of the poem were demanded. According to Holland's *Don Zara del Fogo* (1656),<sup>2</sup> it was "dedicate to all the Nobles and Gentry of either Sex throughout this Nation,"—surely an odd time to dedicate a poem to the nobility, however strong were Parker's royalist sympathies. To Holland, furthermore, we are indebted for the preservation of a few lines from *Valentine and Orson*. "Duke-La-Foole," he remarks, "was armed much like that haughty and Pagan King *Feragus*, of whom the most excellent of our *English* \*Poets thus sings:

\*Martin Parkers Heroick Poem, called Valentine & Orson, Dedicate to all the Nobles and Gentry of either Sex throughout this Nation.

———With a Shirt of Mayle,  
A Helmet of strong Brass  
    upon his head,  
A Shield of the same Mettal,  
    which to fail,  
Was not ordain'd,  
a Sword two handfuls broad, instead  
Of ponderous Club,  
    he bore a well-grown Oak,  
Which threatned certain death  
    at every stroak."

Perhaps these lines will arouse curiosity as to Parker's idea of what constituted a "heroicall" poem rather than a desire to have the remainder of it. Holland himself had little respect for M.P. "O true and unparalell'd Amorist," he exclaims jokingly, "worthy the Pen of another Parker!"<sup>3</sup> Evidently Parker *was* dead in 1656; but to the jocular authors of *Naps upon Parnassus* (1658) he was still

<sup>1</sup> Eyre's *Transcript*, II, 170, 171.

<sup>2</sup> Page 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

"the Ballad-maker, Laureat of London";<sup>1</sup> while in 1659 Alexander Brome felt obliged to lament that

there's no other Standard but Opinion;  
Which varies still, 'cause *fancy* has dominion.  
So *Martin Parker's* laurell'd by some men,  
With as much boldness as the wise do *Ben*.<sup>2</sup>

The last entry in the Stationers' Registers of a new work by Parker was made on April 5, 1660, when Francis Coles licensed his *Most admirable Historie of that most Renowned Christian Worthy Arthur King of the Brittaines*,<sup>3</sup> a quarto of twelve pages. Here Parker merely summarized all current fictions into one "true story," pinning his faith to Geoffrey of Monmouth, and declaring that Arthur's existence can no more be doubted than that of William the Conqueror. Eleven "chapters" are devoted to Arthur's life; and "when he had thus victoriously raigned 26 years," says Parker, "he rendered to death his interest, and his soule to his Redeemer in the year of Grace 543, and was buried at Glasenbury . . . where in this present modern age (I meane within living men's memory) there hath been an old Epitaph, with some other memorials of him found: the Epitaph (so well as I can) I think it not impertinent to render in English:—

#### KING ARTHUR'S EPITAPH.

Here lyes great Arthur, Britains King,  
'Mongst Christian worthies first of three:  
His fame throughout the world doth ring;  
None did such doughty deeds as he.  
Death all unto this passe doth bring:  
He can subdue the greatest King."

The book concludes with an alphabetical list of Arthur's hundred and fifty knights, taken "from an old Chaucerian manuscript."

Perhaps the last contemporary reference to Parker occurs in Dryden's comedy of *Sir Martin Mar-all* (acted in 1667). "There's five shillings for thee," Sir Martin tells Warner; "What? we must

<sup>1</sup> Sign. A 7; first noted by Brydges, *Censura Literaria*, 2d ed., III, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Poetical Preface to A. Brome's edition of *Five new Playes . . . by Richard Brome*.

<sup>3</sup> Eyre's *Transcript*, II, 256; cf. Collier's *Bibliographical Account*, II, 102 f.



encourage good wits sometimes." And Warner scornfully replies: "Hang your white pelf: sure, Sir, by your largess you mistake me for Martin Parker, the Ballad-Maker, your Covetousness has offended my Muse, and quite dulled her."<sup>1</sup>

More than eighty ballads and pamphlets by Parker have survived, but fourteen works licensed under his name in the Stationers' Registers have disappeared, among them being, one suspects, the most pretentious of his efforts.<sup>2</sup> Nine of these are described as books; but many more ballads are undoubtedly lost or can no longer be traced to him. It is incredible, for instance, that he wrote only two ballads in 1637, but I have found no others of that date. Popularity was often fatal to the preservation of broadsides; and, as the names of authors are seldom given in the stationers' entries of ballads, the registers of the Stationers' Company cannot help one to determine what lost ballads Parker wrote.

Much of his extant work is mere compilation. His "True Tale of Robin Hood" is a résumé of various chapbooks and ballads, with perhaps a borrowing from Munday's *Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon*;<sup>3</sup> and in his accounts of St. George, Guy of Warwick, and Valentine and Orson he was no doubt reworking old material, making little pretense at originality but content to "purge truth from falsehood." His well-known ballad of "The King and a Northern Man" seems to be a summary of old ballads and an old play now lost.<sup>4</sup> The signs of the original work are now almost wholly obliterated, but the version which, thanks to him, has come down to us is nearer to being a traditional ballad than anything else he wrote. His "Cooper of Norfolk," too, is a revision of an Elizabethan ballad called "A merry new Song how a Bruer meant to make a Cooper cuckold, and how deere the Bruer paid for the bargaine;"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V, i (pointed out by Chappell and others).

<sup>2</sup> Several of these have already been named. For registrations of the others see Arber's *Transcript*, IV, 290, 298, 367, 453 (cf. 427). See an inquiry about these works in *Notes and Queries*, August 12, 1916, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> See Child's introduction to his ballad No. 154.

<sup>4</sup> See the introduction to Collier's reprint, 1841 (Percy Society's publications, Vol. I); and cf. also entries of works called "Too good to be true" and "The knittinge vypp of too good to be true" (March 31, 1580, and August 11, 1581, Arber's *Transcript*, II, 367, 400), which Collier overlooked.

<sup>5</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 98; Lilly's *Collection of 79 Black-Letter Ballads*, 1867, p. 60.

and, as this older work is preserved, one can readily study Parker's methods and form an idea of how greatly he must have improved other ballads when occasion demanded their revision.

The most distinctive feature of Parker's ballads is their lyrical tone, their harmony of numbers. "The facility and the rhythmical flow of Martin Parker's metres," said Chappell, "made him the most popular ballad-writer of his time, and perhaps of his century."<sup>1</sup> His metrical excellence was due to the remarkably fine way in which he could fit words to the innumerable tunes that floated through his head. Some of his ballads are written in measures far too pretty for the subject-matter. In "Keep a Good Tongue in your Head," a vulgar ballad of advice for women, one almost finds real poetry:

She hath as sweet a face  
 As any in seaven miles space,  
 Her eyes christalline  
 Like diamonds doe shine,  
 She looks with a modest grace:  
 Her haire is like flax,  
 Her lips are red wax,  
 That seale the bond so strong  
 Twixt her and I,  
 That till I die  
 Ile justifie  
 Her constancy,  
*But she cannot rule her tong.*<sup>2</sup>

But usually Parker knew instinctively (what some real poets never learn) how to choose the one meter best adapted to his subject. Although pre-eminently a lyricist, he did not scorn to sing of a monstrous fish or a deformed Italian boy; but he probably wrote ballads of this type only for advertising posters and did not dream of having them classed with his other work. In any case, like some modern writers, Parker was largely at the mercy of his publishers: he wrote what was required, and, if a scarecrow poem on the afflictions of Germany was wanted, who could put so many mournful facts and graphic horrors into such pleasant verse as M.P.? His ballads, too, are remarkably free from coarseness.

<sup>1</sup> *Roxburghe Ballads*, III, 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 238.

After his death Parker shared the usual fate of ballad-mongers. His songs continued to delight the hearts of the common people and to bring money to publishers, ballad-singers, and ballad-revisers, while his own name was rapidly forgotten. It would, however, be almost impossible to estimate the popularity of his ballads during the hundred years that followed his death. Many of them were reprinted in *Seven Dials*, the nineteenth-century home of English ballads, and are still sung in England. In the technique of balladry and in tunefulness of verse Parker has had no equal among professional ballad-writers before or since his day. Collier's tribute to him is just: "Surely those who love poetry, and who sometimes unreasonably expect to meet with it in old ballads of a comparatively modern date, must be satisfied with this sweet, cheerful, pastoral vein of Martin Parker . . . [who] was a much better poet than many give him credit for . . . though he wrote for bread, and wrote to please the vulgar."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Athenaeum*, August 30, 1845, p. 859.